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ABSTRACT

A case study of writing behavior illustrates the potential rift between writers' awareness of audience perspective and their application of this knowledge. Twelve students (four each, aged 9, 13, and 18) in the San Diego, California, school system were asked by their teacher to write two letters about memorable places they had visited--one to a friend and the other to an aunt. During their stimulated recall discussions and interviews, the nine-year-old writers referred to the audiences' interest, location, knowledge of the place described, and experience--a strong suggestion that they were aware of distinctions between the separate audiences' perspectives. However, the letters they wrote gave little evidence that they incorporated this knowledge into their writing. Comments made by the older writers indicated that these writers were also aware of audience perspective, but they appeared to make textual decisions based on this knowledge. Their remarks in interviews and stimulated recalls were consistent with those made during their writing protocols. The nine-year-olds need an impetus to apply their knowledge of audience to their writing, an impetus that comes from recognizing that written language can function interpersonally. To develop the students' own theory of writing, the classroom must become a community concerned with writing and with being an audience for both writing and reading. (Four pages of references are included.) (NKA)

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Audience Awareness and the Interpersonal Function of Writing

(A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 19, 1987, Atlanta, Georgia)

Egocentricity--a concept first investigated by Piaget (1926/1955)--refers to an individual's ability to take account of others' viewpoints. According to Piaget, individuals who are egocenteric are unable to consider perspectives other than their own. Conversely, those who can take into account others' perspectives have decentered, and are no longer restricted by the solipsistic perspective of egocentrism. Piaget believed that egocentricity is developmentally based, that some children retain their egocentric perpsective of the world for as long as twelve years. It would seem reasonable, then, to assume that children whose writing does not accomodate an audience are still limited by their egocentricity.

However, current research suggests that Piaget's belief may have been inaccurate: young children may be no more egocentric than adults (Borke, 1983; Butterworth, 1980; Cox, 1980; Donaldson, 1978; Light & Simmons, 1983; Ochs, 1979; Robinson & Robinson, 1982, 1983). According to this new analysis, Piaget's experimental tasks use words and situations that are unfamiliar to the children being tested. When the tasks are framed in situations familiar to children, in words they understand, evidence of egocentrism virtually disappears.

If, according to this revised understanding of Piaget, children are not necessarily limited by egocentrism, then why do researchers continue to report that young writers are often much less able than older ones to adapt their writing to an audience (Bracewell, Scardamalia, & Bereiter, 1978; Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Kroll, 1978; Rubin & Piche, 1979; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & McDonald, 1977; Smith & Swan, 1978)? Apparently, being able to

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decenter is necessary but not sufficient if individuals are to adjust their writing for an audience. But if it is not, as we had presumed, egocentricity which is preventing youngsters from making audience-related adjustments in their writing, then how can we account for it?

We may come closer to answering this question if we distinguish having an awareness of the audience's perspective from doing something with that awareness. Such a distinction is suggested by the work of several researchers in speech (Alvy, 1973; Delia & Clark, 1977; Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, & Jarvis, 1968) and in writing (Atlas, 1979) who have reported cases where subjects recognize the audience's perspectives, but do not translate these perspectives into adjustments in their spoken or written texts. Writers may know that there is such a thing as perspective, but they may not realize an other's perspective is called for in a particular situation or how to apply this cognition in a text.

To document this distinction myself, I conducted some research intended, in part, to illustrate the potential rift between writers' awareness of the audience's perspective and their application of this knowledge (Fontaine, in press). In a case study of twelve students from the San Diego, California, school system (Fontaine, 1984a), I asked four 9-year-olds, four 13-year -olds, and four 18-year-olds to write two letters about different memorable places they had visited, the first one in response to an imagined letter from a good friend, the second one in response to an imagined letter from a great aunt from France whom they had never met. The procedures of the study (Fontaine 1986b) included, first, a thinking-aloud writing protocol of the writing tasks, where writers were requested to say aloud anything they thought and wrote while composing; second, a stimulated recall discussion, where writers own protocols and letters were the stimuli for further questions and discussion; and third, an oral interview

consisting of a series of questions focused specifically on the differences between writing to a good friend and writing to an unknown aunt from France was conducted after completing the two tasks. The interviews were intended to elicit any remaining information about the subjects' perception of the audience, including questions about the relationship between the audience and the content or style of the letters, the relative difficulty of writing to each audience, and the particular adjustments made for each audience.

By collecting several kinds of information--writing protocols, stimulated recalls, interviews, and the letters themselves--I could analyze various moments during and after composing, comparing what the writers said about the audience's perspective with the specific textual or stylistic decisions they may have made based on the two audiences.

The 9-year-old writers made several comments during their stimulated recall discussions and interviews which strongly suggest that they are aware that the audience's perspective exists and may be different from their own. These comments referred to the audiences' interests, location, knowledge of the place being described, and experience. Some writers explained, for example, how the places they wrote about would interest their audience. Beth told me:

> I chose [Disneyland] because I felt that [my friend] would like--because I thought it was a kid, so he'd like a place more like play. And I thought this aunt [the intended audience] would like to know about my other aunt [the topic of the letter] (Interview).

Tracy explained that she had been imagining her friend Linda when she wrote about going to the Pacific Ocean. According to Tracy, Linda enjoys the beach:

> When we go to the beach she always brings her bogie board, and she always goes and plays with it. I just remembered, you

> know, I took this friend out, and she liked it [the Pacific Ocean] a lot, so I thought I'd write about it (Stimulated recall 1A).

Jim wrote to his friend about camping in the Sierras and to his aunt about going to Cabrillo Monument (a national monument and whale watching site in San Diego). He defended his topic choices in terms of what would have impressed his audiences. Jim believed that his friend would be impressed by the bears he had seen on the camping trip. His great aunt from France, "if she knows about Cabrillo monument," would be impressed by the fact that he had gone to Cabrillo Monument and not seen any whales.

Jim also made a connection between the location of his audience and economics when he explained to me why his letter to a friend was five pages long and his letter to his great aunt from France was only six lines long:

> [The letter to my great aunt] is more like what most people would write for a letter because it's not very much. And it--for most people it'd cost a lot for them to send even just a little letter to a place that far away. And they wouldn't write too much either if they were writing to that place (Stimulated recall 1B).

Because I thought there might be a relationship between the writers' audience and the way writers presented their topics, I did not specify a discourse type for the original task. Rather than telling writers how to present the information in their letters, I described several ways that it could be done: tell a story about something that happened when visiting the important place; describe the important place; or try to convince the reader that the place is more memorable than anything he or she could have seen.

In this last example, Beth talks about the relationship between her knowledge of the audience and the way she presented her information to that

audience. During our stimulated recall discussion of the letter to a friend, Beth explained that because she lacked certain information about her friend's point of view, she chose not to convince her friend that the place she saw was more memorable: "It's just that I was supposed to try to convince my friend that we went somewhere better like. And I didn't know where he went."

These descriptions and quotations suggest that the 9-year-olds filled-in for themselves details about their audiences' perspective, about their interests, experience, location, and familiarity with them. However, at other times, these same young writers supplied contradictory accounts of their audiences. There was also little evidence that the children used these other perspectives in their letters. In other words, while the 9-year-olds appear to be able to construct an audience and see parts of the world in relation to the audience, they often sustain neither a consistent view nor a consistent use of the audience throughout the research task--from writing protocol, to letter, to stimulated recall, to interview.

Recall Jim's explanation for why one of his letters was so much shorter than the other--that it would have cost too much to send a long letter all the way to France. Jim later contradicts himself, revealing a different explanation. When writing the long letter to his friend, Jim told me that he was "busy wanting to get out of math class" (Stimulated recall 1A). In contrast, Jim explained to me after completing his six-line letter to his great aunt that he had been in a hurry to finish and return to science class (Extemporaneous conversation).

Tracy also contradicted herself. During our stimulated recall discussion, Tracy had explained that she wrote to her friend Linda about the Pacific Ocean because Linda enjoyed going to the ocean beach. However, in her interview, when I asked whether her friend was familiar with the Pacific Ocean, Tracy apparently forgot her earlier description of Linda's

perspective when she explained: "No, [she's not familiar with the ocean, but] I think she might have at least seen it in a book or a poster or something" (Interview).

The letters themselves gave little evidence that the 9-year-olds incorporated what they knew about the audience into their writing. Once I had removed any obvious clues (salutations, closing, direct references to the audience), I asked outside readers to decide who the intended audience was for each letter in the pair and to justify their choices. The readers could correctly name the audiences for only Beth's pair of letters.

The outside readers explained that they had determined the intended audiences of Beth's letters based on the "voice" she had used. The letter to her friend is "energetic" and "breathless," as if she were excitedly telling a friend about a fun day. The letter to her great aunt was "a simple catalog of events" that "revealed little about the writer," a voice which readers found appropriately distant and uninvolved for an adult audience. These qualities are apparent in the two letters below. I have kept original spelling and punctuation in all examples.

> Dear friend,
> I am going to tell you about the time I went to Disneyland. It was so exiting. There is this neat ride. I forget the name of the ride but I remember it goes down this waterfall. It was very scary. I almost fell out. I was so scared I hid under the dash board. When I stood up to sit down on the floor. I fell! It was close but I grabed on to my seat climbed back in and I did not sit on the floor I sat in my seat and held on. For lunch I had this delisious hamberger, fries and a large coke. We went home at 2:00 in the morning.

> Dear Aunt,
> Last week I went to my other Aunts house. We went up to the Mountains. We also went to see a Man from Snowy River. We got some toys there too they have a two story house. They have romates too. Me and my sister slept on the floor it was uncomfortable when we woke up our back hurt. We had breakfast played dominoes and then we met my mom and dad at the deli. Then me and my sister went home.

None of the other writers' letters give any hint that they had been directed to different audiences. Consider Tracy's letters. Beyond the

salutations, there appear to be no clues as to why the letters would be more appropriate for one or the other audience. Letter one was addressed to the great aunt, letter two to a good friend.

> Letter 1:
> I read your letter and it was marvoles my most exciting place I have ever been to was Disneyland. I like Diseneyland because it has fun rides and you have so much to do. When our family went to Disneyland I was never bored the first thing I did when I got there I planed what rides I was going on first. It took me a long time because all the rides were so exciting but I finlly figured it out. After I planed the rides I planed where I was going to meet my parents and where I was going to eat when I was hungry. I went on many rides then I got hungry so my frined Tanya and I went and got a bite to eat then we went in a candy store and bought a bag of lickrish and we walked arond and saw different things. We ate our candy That night we slept in the Disneyland Hotel The next morning we ate breafast and went out to go on the rides That afternoon my family and I went home and unpacked. Someday we are going to Disneyland agin next time we go our family would like you to come. I hope you can make it.

> Letter 2:
> I read the letter you sent me and my most exciting place I have been in is the Pacific Ocean. It is exciting to me because it has many creacters like starfish and plan fish. It had many big animals like whales and dolifans and shark My family and I have been whale watching befour on or boat. We see lots of whales and dolfins. Sometimes we see schools of seals, and sea lions swimming around or boat. One day I would like to invite you to see many different animals we see in the ocean. Sometimes when we go to the ocean the waves are very big thats why we have to ware life jackets so we don't fall overbord and will not trande [drowned]. One of the times when you come on the boat with us I'm sure you will ware a life jacet to.

I will refer to the the 13- and 18-year-olds as a single group of "older" writers. This is not to suggest that the two groups are identical. Rather, in terms of what these writers say about audience and how they use this information, there are more similarities between the two groups than there are differences.

The thinking-aloud-writing protocols of the older writers indicate that these writers were also aware of the audience's perspective, of their audience's interest, nationality, and age. But, unlike the 9-year olds, these writers seem to be making textual decisions based on their knowledge of the audience. Sharon had in mind her audience's interests when selecting the places she would write about in her letters. Here are two comments she

made in her writing protocols. The first is in reference to the letter to her friend; the second is in reference to the letter to her great aunt:

> A friend might not think [the Louvre] is very interesting if they're not--if they don't see the value in the art that I saw--which is what made it interesting to me.

> I'd like to write about somewhere that I went that would be very exciting to [my great aunt] because she's used to Europe. So I should probably write about a place that maybe she hasn't had a chance to see.

As the following examples illustrate, writing-protocol comments suggest that several of the older subjects made content decisions based on the fact that their great aunt lived so far away, in France (The task instructions only mention France; Paris is not named.):

> I guess I'll pretty much want to explain the country more than anything else because she's never been here (Eddie 1A).

> I'll say maybe [New York] is not as extravagant as Paris is, but it, they have lots of things in big department stores there (Carrie 1B).

> I'd like a nice analogy here [subject writes] "thicker than." What's the rainiest part of France? [subject reads] "thicker than" [subject writes] "a Paris cloudburst"--I mean she does live in France (Kent 1B).

A third way that the older subjects thought about the audience was in terms of age:

> If that was my great aunt that lived in France I probably wouldn't go into too much detail. I'd probably confuse her--especially since she's probably going to be pretty old (Janet

1B).

Again, unlike the 9-year-olds, the older writers made comments in their interviews and stimulated recalls that were consistent with those they made during their writing protocols. The retrospective comments either corroborated earlier remarks about audience attributes or added new, but consistent information.

Two outside readers correctly identified in every case the intended audiences for the writers' letters. To illustrate how easy it was to identify the intended audiences for whom the older subjects wrote, I have included below the opening paragraphs from two pairs of letters. The first letter in each pair was written to a good friend; the second was written to a great aunt from France.

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD WRITER

Dear Tony,
How's it going? Glad you had a good time at Franconia Notch. Your description reminded me of a place in the Adirondacks (which I might already have told you about) called Lake Tear of the Clouds. It's about half a mile south of Mt. Marcey, the highest peak in New York, in the saddle between Gray Peak and Mt. Skylight. It's the highest source of the Hudson River, 4300 feet above sea level.

Dear Grandma Ditmer,
I wish we could have gotten to the Alps when we were in Europe. It seems we missed a lot. There are a lot of beautiful places in America also. Yellowstone National Park, in northeastern Wyoming, is a fantastic place. Most of the people who go there see the big geysers (like Old Faithful) and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. But even without these big attractions, there are several gorgeous spots in the park. One of my favorite places in the park, and even in the world, is the Gibbon Meadows near the Norris Geyser Basin campground.

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD WRITER

Dear John,
You think you've got me beat! But I have been to a better place than you could ever imagine, which I wouldn't think of ever forgetting. Do you remember last Christmas when we went away? We went to Kenya, you know, in Africa. Well, there's no comparison!

Dear Madame Schmidt,
How are you, and when will you come visit us? I went to a neet place last summer too. Can you guess where? I went to Minnisota, and I went there to go to a french camp. There are many many trees and I'm sure

that there were just as many lakes.

In the letters written to Tony and Grandma Ditmer (both of whom are real people), the writer begins the letter to his friend more casually than the letter to his great aunt. Although both letters begin by making reference to places that his correspondents visited, the writer uses colloquial language with Tony, dropping the subject of the second sentence. The same kind of reference to Grandma Ditmer is polite and "correct." While the letter to Tony makes reference to their past conversations, it is clear from the first paragraph he writes to Grandma Ditmer, that he imagines her as someone who is not familiar with United States geography, who may not know where Yellowstone Park or Wyoming are.

The strongest distinction between the letters to John (a real person) and Madame Schmidt (a fictitious name) is in the tone that the writer uses. The letter to John sets up a competitive situation; the writer nearly dares John to have visited a more interesting place than Africa. In the letter to Madame Schmidt, the writer uses a polite tone; the opening lines are formulaic.

Given the audience of "good friend" and "great aunt from France," writers at all three ages filled-in these general descriptions with appropriate details about age, nationality, and interest. The older writers made more references to the audience in their writing protocols and supplied more detail than the younger ones--making references to the city in which the great aunt lived in France or a particular kind of food their good friend may have eaten at Disneyland. But what most differentiates the older writers from the younger ones is not <u>what</u> they know about their audience, but <u>when</u> and <u>how</u> they call forth and use this knowledge. The 13- and 18-year-old writers talked about the audiences' perspectives during their

writing protocols as well as in their retrospective interview and stimulated recall accounts. Unlike most of the 9-year-olds, these writers apparently thought about the audience as they wrote. Quite possibly as a result of this, the intended audiences were easily distinguished in the older writers' letters.

Not all of the 9-year-olds applied what they knew about the audience in a consistent or adaptive way. They had little sense that the audience about whom they spoke and for whom they retrospectively justified writing decisions could have been a present, generative construct in their writing. If we were to envision Flower and Hayes (1981) cognitive model of the composing process for these 9-year-olds, the arrows connecting the structural units in the model would not be solid. That is, although the audience features exist in the writer's long-term memory and task environment, they do not feed into the writing process. They seem to circle around the process, their existence acknowledged by these novice writers but their significance not yet understood.

In what are these writers "deficient?" Given that they can construct others' perspectives, recognizing them as being different from their own, it does not seem accurate to claim that they are lacking "audience awareness." But if being "aware of an audience" does not ensure that writers will adapt their writing to that audience, then our current thinking about audience awareness may not be adequate to the reality of the concept we are describing. Apparently something more is required if writers are to use their awareness of the audience in their writing. What is required is the impetus to apply this knowledge to their writing, an impetus that comes from recognizing that written language can function interpersonally.

According to the linguist M.A.K. Halliday (1977), two ways that spoken and written language can function to make meaning are ideationally--reflecting reportorial logic and representation of experience and

interpersonally--reflecting social relationships between discourse participants. The interpersonal function in speech is almost immediately evident to children. Their speech is met by an interactive response and commonly accompanies actions to which the meaning of words is clearly relevant (Donaldson, 1984). Whether this response is verbal or physical, it is clearly stimulated by the child's language and continues the communicative situation initiated by the child. Written language is not responded to in the same way. Children's scribbling is not done with either the intent or the result of communication (Teberosky, 1982). The scribbles change into early attempts at letters and words. But because of the way we learn to write--mastering a shifting hierarchy of letters, words, phrases, sentences--the interpersonal function of writing is often postponed when we enter school. In the early years of schooling children worry about perception and motor control (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). The interpersonal function of writing is characteristically discouraged in exchange for a concern with scribal correctness: correct letter shapes, correct spelling, correct punctuation, correctly writing on the line, correctly erasing without ripping through the paper. When the rules of correctness are sufficiently mastered, the child begins to write stories. Once again, the interpersonal function of writing is set aside--this time it is displaced by the ideational function of expressing ideas, and relating experiences. An additional problem for young children is their tendency to keep the functions of language separate (Halliday, 1977, p. 31): even if writing functions interpersonally at home--notes from Mom and Dad on the kitchen table--this function may be left behind when the child gets on the school bus.

Returning to the 9-year-old writers in my study, we can now see that those who did not incorporate into their letters their awareness of the

audience's perspective may not yet acknowledge the interpersonal function of writing. It is not surprising, then, that Tracy addressed her letter to "Dear Friend" rather than use her friend's name because, "I just thought she was, you know, [the task] meant a friend, but not [to use] the name" (Stimulated recall 1A). In fact, whereas the eight older writers used real or imagined names in their salutations, all four 9-year-old writers used generic salutations of "Dear Friend," or "Dear Great Aunt." For the most part these young writers used their letters to express ideas and to relate their experiences. They did not acknowledge the interpersonal function of their writing.

But the ability to recognize and use the interpersonal function of writing is not necessarily age-related. Shaughnessy (1977) maintained that ". . . Basic Writing students, who have generally read very little and who have written only for teachers, have difficulty believing in a real audience" (p. 39). Such writers have never been introduced to the interpersonal function of writing. Similarly, among the older writers in my study, some made audience distinctions in their letters and writing protocols much more clearly than others. As writing teachers, we encounter every semester students who, if not unaware of the interpersonal function, are at least more concerned with the ideational function. Even the echoing complaint: "I don't know what you want," relfects students' concern with "What information and ideas do you expect me to include," rather than "How can I express myself so that I can predict and engage your response?"

Making students aware of the interpersonal function of writing calls for more than a series of exercises designed to encourage writers to consider the audience. Before such exercises can work, we need to convince students of the multi-functional nature of written language. Conceptual uses of writing dominate our classrooms--short answer essays, information-based research papers, interpretations of texts. If exercises in audience-adaptation are

to take hold, they must be part of students' total understanding of writing. Gundlach (1979) refers to this understanding when he says, ". . . we must figure into the writer's development . . . the writer's own theory of what it means to write, of the functions writing can serve, and of the forms and conventions which characterize various kinds of texts" (p. 128).

To develop students' own theory of writing we need to turn the classroom into a community which is concerned with writing and with being an audience for both writing and reading. As children learn to write they, like all writers, need an audience (Graves, 1985). Not only is the teacher alone an insufficient audience, too often the only response teachers give students is a terminal, evaluative one. By having students explore the voices they incorporate into their own writing and the voices they respond to as readers (Bialostosky, 1984), asking them to write to each other or to others outside the classroom (Elbow, 1973; Heath & Branscombe, 1983), using classroom publications (Graves, 1983), and responding to students' writing in questioning, provocative ways, we can begin to give students experience with having an audience, with being an audience, and with the interpersonal as well as the ideational function of writing.

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